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The Evolution of Turkish Policy Toward the US

Recent Turkish actions underline the country's more assertive course toward us:

- Turkey has extended to DECA by moving its 30 April deadline for a new agreement back to September. As welcome as this action is, it only confirms that the DECA negotiations are deadlocked.
- The Turks have rejected our charges against the chief of the Libyan Peoples Bureau in Ankara by making it publicly known that he has not been linked to any terrorist acts in Turkey. Yet this individual has been so incontrovertibly linked to terrorism that he had been PNGd by the US and Switzerland.

Besides being irritating, these actions are also symptomatic of a new Turkish attitude that is engendered by three main factors--long-standing prejudices, old grievances, and new pressures.

- The prejudice relates to the ethnocentric Turkish view of the world and to perceived slights when the US is more generous in its aid to Israel and Egypt and when the US makes a five year military support commitment to Pakistan while telling the Turks that the budget process makes it impossible to give them a five year commitment.
- The grievances are the memories created by the 1964 "Johnson letter" (written primarily by George Ball and warning Ankara that it could not count on US support in case of a Soviet countermove to any Turkish military action on Cyprus); the 1974 arms embargo; and, more recently, the recurring pin pricks administered by Greece (a NATO member proclaiming another NATO member as its main enemy) as well as Congress (support of the 7 to 10 Greek-Turkey military support ratio and recurring consideration of the Armenian Genocide resolution).
- The new pressures involve Turkey's evolution as a nation and its relationship with its neighbors. They include:
  - On the economic front, Prime Minister Ozal is pushing systemic and structural change, that is a free market economy based on new industries. For his program to succeed he needs to attract investments and increase exports. Western investors, however, remain wary of the country's commitment to the free market system and of the

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possibility of a return to the chaos of the 70s. As to exports, Western European countries and the US have imposed limits on the rate of growth of the market share of Turkey's most competitive products which are textiles and steel. So far, Ozal has spurred the economy into faster growth, has greatly improved Turkey's foreign exchange position; but has been able to do little about inflation and unemployment which are still running at around 40 and 20 percent respectively.

- These continuing high inflation and unemployment rates are becoming particularly worrisome when the government is gradually lifting the controls imposed during the martial law period and as Ozal starts shaping a strategy for the next general election which must be held by 1988.
- Finally, in foreign policy, Turkey is interested in living up to what it sees as its manifest destiny of serving as a bridge between the West and much of the Islamic world. Unfortunately, Turkey has as its neighbors three of the most belligerent Islamic countries--Iran, Syria and Iraq. Yet this aspect of its foreign relations is not just a mythical quest but rather an important part of its economic hope of developing markets in Islamic countries. Thus, Turkish interests are being vitally affected by the oil market fluctuations, the Iran-Iraq war, the Palestinian issue, and the current Libyan crisis. Its frustration about being able to do so little to shape the outcome of these issues probably contributes to its more demanding attitude toward the US. Right now, however, its exports to mid-Eastern oil producers are being disrupted by the decreased revenues of those states.

Of the three factors discussed above the new pressures are probably the most important stimuli pushing Turkey toward reshaping its relationship with us. The new dynamic they are engendering does not mean the US-Turkish alliance is ending. Rather it means that in order to maintain this mutually important alliance we must monitor more closely than ever the context in which Turkish policy toward us is being made.

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